



# Associations Between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Existential Isolation

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## Background

- Adverse childhood experiences has been heavily linked to loneliness
- Existential isolation has also been linked to negative psychological well-being
- Additional work has also shown that childhood abuse was uniquely associated with greater loneliness among young adults (Landry et al., 2022)
- But the impact of early life experiences on loneliness can be impacted by a multitude of factors including, but not limited to, age, gender, socioeconomic factors, and epigenetic factors (Southwick et al., 2014)
- This present study aims to qualitatively examine the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and existential isolation among adult individuals

## Hypotheses

- Adverse childhood experiences is positively correlated to higher feelings of existential isolation (EI)
- Higher ACEs was associated with lower life-satisfaction and meaning in life, as well as higher depression

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## Method

- MTurk participants ( $N = 323$ ;  $n = 134$  male; 85.8% Caucasian;  $M_{age} = 40.48$ ;  $SD = 11.75$ )
- This study used a remote, cross-sectional, and correlational design based on a study that utilized self-report measures
- Participants were asked a series of questionnaires that examined how many adverse childhood experiences they were impacted by, loneliness, meaning in life, satisfaction in life, depression and anxiety, and thoughts of death
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Questionnaire
- Satisfaction with Life Scale
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
- Beck Depression Inventory

Correlations

		ACEs	Existential Isolation	Depression	Satisfaction in Life	Meaning in Life
ACEs	Pearson Correlation	1	.278**	.383**	-.154**	-.114*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	.004	.036
	N	342	342	341	338	338
Existential Isolation	Pearson Correlation	.278**	1	.347**	-.400**	-.343**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	342	342	341	338	338
Depression	Pearson Correlation	.383**	.347**	1	-.564**	-.580**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	341	341	341	338	338
Satisfaction in Life	Pearson Correlation	-.154**	-.400**	-.564**	1	.641**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	338	338	338	338	338
Meaning in Life	Pearson Correlation	-.114*	-.343**	-.580**	.641**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.036	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	338	338	338	338	338

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## Analyses

- Our findings across two studies established a positive association between individuals who have experienced adverse childhood experiences and existential isolation
- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) were significantly correlated to feelings of loneliness and existential isolation
- Our findings support the idea that ACEs are related to lower life-satisfaction and meaning in life, and higher depression

## Implications

- Very little research has examined the link between existential isolation and how those who have been impacted by childhood maltreatment fare
- This study has added to the body of knowledge in existential isolation research
- Limitations of this study were its self-report collection measures, as the results could have been skewed when participants saw the gravity of the survey questions (e.g., the childhood trauma questions)
- Further directions should consider whether I-sharing mitigates the effects of existential isolation as it specifically relates to childhood adversity

## References

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